

## **Oklahoma 2005 Legislative Initiatives and Sample Language**

### **The Need for 45-Day Ballot Transit Time**

The most persistent problem which continues to face Oklahoma military and overseas voters is the extremely short period of time these voters have to receive, vote, and return their absentee ballots in order to be counted. While electronic transmission of election materials offers an alternative to inadequate ballot transit time in emergency situations, the fact remains that insufficient ballot transit time through the mail continues to be the primary obstacle to the timely delivery of absentee ballots for those who request them. For Oklahoma, our *2004-2005 Voting Assistance Guide* states that local election officials mail out ballots approximately 30 days before an election. While we commend you for expanding the time between the state run-off election and the General Election, Postal Service statistics indicate that a **45-day transit time is needed** for absentee ballots sent through international mail or the military APO/ FPO (overseas) post offices. This round trip transit time is especially necessary because of the remote location of many military personnel and overseas citizens such as sailors and marines aboard ship, airmen and sailors at isolated tracking sites around the world, as well as Department of State personnel and citizen employees of American multinational corporations in remote areas. **Forty-one** other states have increased their ballot transit times to greater than 30 days.

### **Sample Language**

*For all elections, the official charged with the printing and distribution of ballots and election materials shall print as many absentee ballots as may be necessary as soon as possible after receiving the information concerning candidates and measures to be voted on at an election, and balloting materials shall be mailed not later than the 45th day before the election.*

### **Electronic Transmission of Election Materials**

Since the 1990 general election, faxing has proven to be a valuable alternative method for facilitating the enfranchisement of military persons and overseas citizens serving their country who may have otherwise been unable to vote. This initiative has helped to ensure that these citizens were not disenfranchised by allowing them to cast a ballot when they would not otherwise have been able to vote due to time and location constraints.

Throughout an election year cycle, various circumstances exist that require the need for this alternative procedure in order for citizens to vote. The basic concept of electronic transmission of election materials is to secure high-speed delivery of election materials to and from the voter and local election officials. Your support in developing the **acceptance of electronic transmission for all aspects of the process**, with proper controls, would cut the ballot transit time at least in half. This would reduce the major obstacle to voting absentee and allow local election officials more administrative flexibility in preparing election materials.

Although we realize that Oklahoma enacted legislation to provide for the electronic transmission of the FPCA ballot request, and for the electronic transmission of the blank ballot and acceptance of the voted ballot under certain limited circumstances, we encourage expanded use of this alternative to include the use of electronic transmission of the blank ballot and acceptance of the voted ballot on a regular basis, as an alternative method, not merely during certain limited circumstances.

**Sample Language**

*An elections official may send blank ballots and accept voted ballots from eligible electors who are members of the United States Uniformed Services, merchant marine, or family members, or qualified electors living outside the United States via electronic transmission.*